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ABSTRACT

Intended for parents, the handbook explores the nature of and rationale for integration with young disabled children. Social and instructional integration are defined and similarities with mainstreaming are noted. Answers are provided to commonly asked questions, such as whether nonhandicapped students begin to imitate behaviors of handicapped students and whether nonhandicapped students will make fun of their handicapped peers. Additional topics addressed include progress for both handicapped and nonhandicapped students, the role of related services, differences between traditional special education classes and full-time integrated classes, and benefits for nonhandicapped children. (CL)

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INTEGRATION

A PARENT HANDBOOK

EC 190 229

Prepared by
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INTRODUCTION

An integrated class is one in which both handicapped and nonhandicapped children are taught together. Often, parents have questions about this type of class, particularly if it is the first time they have considered it for their child. This handbook will address some of these questions and define commonly used terms. It has been written in a question-answer format for easy reading and referral. We hope this handbook will help parents and professionals feel comfortable about discussing common concerns.

It is difficult to write something that will be read by many people, all of whom have different backgrounds and experiences. Words need to be chosen so that the majority of people will understand and feel comfortable with their meaning. One word that is often used in this handbook is "handicapped". It was chosen over other words because it is less awkward to read, most universally understood, and does not suggest a negative image like "disabled". A handicapped child is one who has unique and special needs that require extra adult attention. Adaptations to his environment may help the handicapped youngster learn better, or get around with less effort.

This handbook has been written to answer questions about handicapped and nonhandicapped children of both sexes. However, there is no bisexual pronoun that can be used appropriately, and a combination like "he/she" is too cumbersome. Therefore, "he" and "she" are used interchangeably in this text and apply to either sex.

WHAT DOES INTEGRATION MEAN?

"Integration" is usually defined as a joining of two groups that were previously separated, in this case, handicapped and nonhandicapped school children. However, programs that are involved with integration go a step further in their definition. They talk about children being together both instructionally and socially. They stress that integration is more than a handicapped child's physical presence in the same room as nonhandicapped children. Turnbull and Schulz (1979), say *social integration* means that the handicapped child is an equal member of the classroom, with full rights and responsibilities. The child is able to establish friendships and to gain recognition for things done well. The basis for social integration lies in the fact that teachers respect the strengths and weaknesses of all children, and foster this kind of attitude among their students.

Instructional integration means that the handicapped child is involved in the regular classroom curriculum (Turnbull and Schulz, 1979). Instructional strategies include teaching the students alone, or in small or large groups. It does not necessarily mean that the handicapped student works on the same skills and concepts as the rest of the class. Rather, she works on skills appropriate for her abilities within the same context. An example would be a unit on farm animals; some children may match pictures of animals; others may learn sign language for the names of the animals; while some may learn to write the first letter of the animal's name.

WHAT IS MAINSTREAMING?

Mainstreaming is similar to integration because it means that handicapped children are educated with their nonhandicapped peers. Usually, this term refers to a handicapped child being included in the regular classroom, with the same curriculum, and few educational support services. In this handbook, the term "integration" will be used, but the points made could easily apply to "mainstreaming".

WHY SHOULD YOU INTEGRATE CHILDREN AT A YOUNG AGE?

Handicapped children can be integrated into regular classrooms at any age. The younger the child, the easier it is. Early childhood programs usually put more emphasis on socialization and self-help skills than programs for older children. Children with special needs can learn about sharing, taking turns, hanging up a coat and washing hands along with the other youngsters without extra teaching preparation. It is also good for children to learn about and accept differences at a young age because this is when their values system is developing. A child with a hearing loss has to understand that the world hears even though she can't. She has to learn how to communicate her needs and feelings to others. The other children have to learn that most of the world hears, but here is someone who can't. They have to learn to relate to a child with this difference. If children learn to accept differences in people at a young age, this may become a way of life as they get older.

WILL THE NONHANDICAPPED STUDENTS START IMITATING BEHAVIORS OF THE HANDICAPPED CHILDREN?

Research with young children indicates that nonhandicapped students do not imitate abnormal behavior (Guralnick, 1979). Teachers in integrated classes have found that nonhandicapped students will occasionally imitate an unusual behavior perhaps because they are curious about it. They usually discard it after awhile when it doesn't prove to be useful.

WILL THE NONHANDICAPPED CHILDREN MAKE FUN OF THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

All children have a natural curiosity which prompts questions and staring. In an integrated classroom, the atmosphere should encourage questioning and seeking understandable answers by all children. A goal for the handicapped child is that he will eventually be able to respond appropriately when asked about his handicap. A good time to start working on this is at a young age, when simple, straight-forward questions are asked. A goal for the nonhandicapped child is that he will be able to accept and respect differences in other people. These goals are fostered by teachers who respond immediately or plan an appropriate learning activity following a question about a child's handicap. For example, during group time, the teacher may ask each child to tell something he is really good at and something that is hard for him. Discussion may focus on the fact that every person is different, and that's what makes the world interesting.

WHAT KIND OF PROGRESS DO HANDICAPPED CHILDREN MAKE IN AN INTEGRATED CLASS?

Since 1978, the Albuquerque Special Preschool has been conducting research on handicapped and nonhandicapped children in both traditional and integrated classes.

Our research on play skills of delayed children in integrated classes showed positive results. These children developed higher level play skills at a similar rate, although not at the same level of complexity, as their normal peers. This is important because many play skills are necessary to the development of language and social growth.

Developmental tests also showed that handicapped children who were integrated over a long period of time increased their growth significantly. All of these findings suggest that an integrated classroom might be very beneficial for some handicapped children.

An instrument was developed to assist professionals in making classroom placements. This checklist of behaviors has been helpful, when considered with other information about a child's development, in deciding which classroom is appropriate. The teachers have found the checklist useful for predicting success in an integrated classroom.

WILL THE NONHANDICAPPED CHILD MAKE AS MUCH PROGRESS IN AN INTEGRATED CLASS AS HE WOULD IN A REGULAR CLASS?

Nonhandicapped children placed in integrated classes were compared to similar children in a regular preschoool or kindergarten class. The children who were integrated actually showed higher levels of play skills; and no differences were found in the academic readiness skills of the two groups. Thus, it appears that nonhandicapped children are not "held back" socially or academically when they are in classes with handicapped peers.

WHY AREN'T ALL HANDICAPPED CHILDREN INTEGRATED?

An important concept, that was formed in special education circles some years ago and that is now a law, is that all handicapped children should be educated in the "least restrictive environment." The aim is to provide normal experiences for these youngsters whenever possible. For some handicapped children this means placement in a regular classroom full time. These children will benefit from watching, hearing, playing and working side by side with nonhandicapped peers. They have enough skills so that a lot of teacher direction is not necessary.

Other handicapped children have physical, emotional or learning needs that require more teacher attention than they could receive in a regular classroom on a full time basis. These youngsters may experience integration with nonhandicapped peers by going into a regular classroom for short periods of time, like for music or social events. Others may interact with non-handicapped children through playing together on the playground or eating lunch together; however, they require a special education classroom environment for most of the day. The goal is to provide "the least restrictive environment" that will help each child in the best way possible.

WILL THE HANDICAPPED CHILD RECEIVE THE SAME TYPE OF SPEECH OR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN AN INTEGRATED CLASS AS HE WOULD IN A SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASS?

Usually, children in an integrated class receive therapeutic services based on their individual needs. Some children may see the therapist alone or in a small group. Often times, therapists act as consultants to teachers. They meet regularly and discuss activities that can be done in the classroom that will satisfy specific therapeutic needs of a particular child, and will also benefit the entire group. These ways of delivering therapy are the same in either a traditional special education class or an integrated class.

HOW IS A FULL-TIME INTEGRATED CLASS DIFFERENT FROM A TRADITIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASS?

IS IT DIFFERENT FROM A REGULAR CLASSROOM?

Special education and early childhood teachers who teach in an integrated class were asked this question. Their answers came from experience teaching in both an integrated class as well as a traditional class.

The children in a traditional special education classroom receive more direct teacher intervention throughout the day than in an integrated classroom. Their schedule is more structured with fewer choices of things to do. There are more adults and fewer children in a traditional special education classroom than in an integrated classroom.

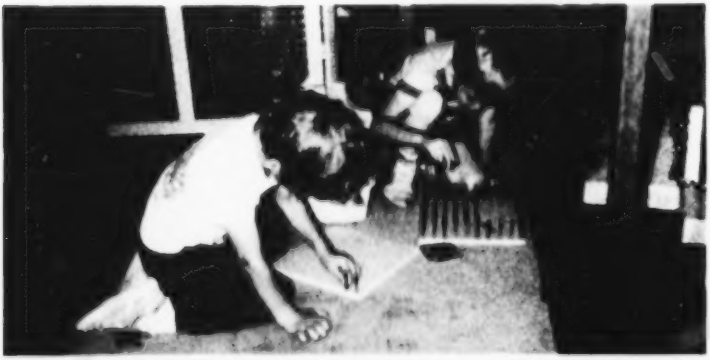
Most classes that are integrated full-time resemble a regular education class more than they do a special education class. The children have to make many choices of things to do throughout the day and there is less teacher direction. Teachers often facilitate learning rather than directing it. There are about the same number of children in an integrated class as there are in a regular education class; however, there are more adults. All the teachers commented that they are very aware of individual children's needs in an integrated class.

WHAT BENEFITS DO NONHANDICAPPED CHILDREN RECEIVE FROM AN INTEGRATED CLASSROOM?

Parents of nonhandicapped children in an integrated preschool class were asked this question during an interview:

All children benefit from the smaller pupil-teacher ratio of an integrated classroom. Due to the emphasis on the special needs of the handicapped students, the teachers focus on the individuality of all children. In program planning, the teachers devote attention to all developmental areas, creating many opportunities for nonhandicapped children for growth in a rich and varied environment.

Benefits for the entire family result when their nonhandicapped child is placed in an integrated classroom. One parent said, "This classroom showed me that the handicapping condition is not the most important thing about a child." Other parents feel that because their children are exposed to different handicapping conditions at an early age, they have to develop age-appropriate explanations about differences. In general, families gain much insight into their own and other children. One parent recounted this statement made by her child about a handicapped student, "When I was new in this class, I didn't really like him, and I didn't understand him. Now, he's a friend of mine."



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